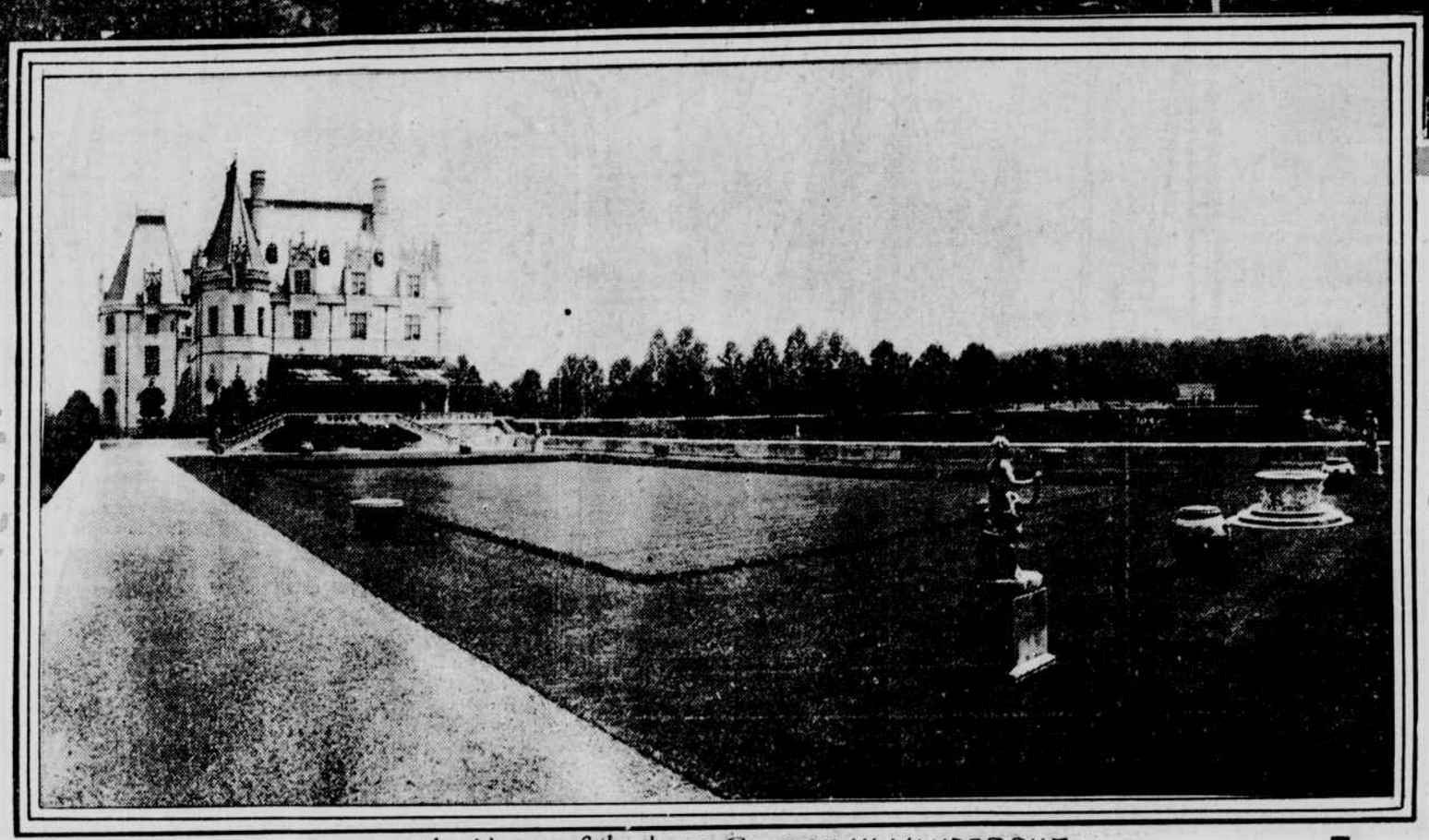
BEAUTIFUL PISGAH FOREST WAS VANDERBILT'S PET

PISGAH MOUNTAINS *from the* PIGEON RIVER.



BILTMORE. *the* HOME *of the* LATE GEORGE W. VANDERBILT

Love of Vast Woodland Made Him a Forester

Nation to Acquire It from Late Owner's Estate

TRY to think of a forest as a natural entity, a living something with a spirit which breathes upon you as you saunter along its sun-flecked aisles. You may then be able to appreciate the affectionate care which the late George W. Vanderbilt bestowed upon Pisgah Forest, soon now to become a part of the Appalachian Forest Reserve. He must have loved that vast community of trees as one loves his dog; he must have delighted in its many moods as one does in those of a favorite child, for he groomed it and fed it and protected it until his dying day.

And this meant no little time and trouble and outlay, for Pisgah Forest, measuring 86,700 acres, is no mere lapdog of a pet. It meant the introduction of scientific forestry into a country utterly ignorant of such a science, the establishment of a forestry school, the development of a c..mpetent corps of rangers, the creation of a fire-fighting system and of a game preserve, since no forest can be considered a complete forest without its fauna. It was really something more than a pet to him, something too big for private possession except in trust for humanity.

Mrs. Vanderbilt brings this out clearly in the letter in which she made the offer of the forest to the government. She wrote:

THE OBLIGATION OF THE FOREST OWNER.

Mr. Vanderbilt was the first of the large forest owners in America to adopt the practice of forestry. He has conserved Pisgah Forest from the time he bought it up to his death, a period of nearly twenty-five years, under the firm conviction that every forest owner owes it to those who follow him to hand down his forest property to them unimpaired by wasteful use.

I keenly sympathize with his belief that the private ownership of forest land is a public trust, and I probably realize more keenly than any one else can do how firm was his resolve never to permit injury to the permanent value and usefulness of Pisgah Forest.

I wish earnestly to make such disposition of Pisgah Forest as will maintain in the fullest and most permanent way its national value as an object lesson in forestry as well as its wonderful beauty and charms; and I realize that its ownership by the nation will alone make its preservation permanent and certain.

Gifford Pinchot points out in his forestry primer that a forest is not simply a collection of trees. It possesses a soil of its own and a carpet or sponge to protect it; it maintains its own drainage system and climate and shelters a host of wild inhabitants in the branches of its trees, in its undergrowth, in its streams. It possesses, in other words, an individuality which man in his omnipotence may destroy or enhance according as his taste and understanding dictate.

ADDING BEAUTY TO WHAT IS ALREADY BEAUTIFUL.

Mr. Vanderbilt chose to enhance the individuality of the forest which fell to his fortunate lot. He began by naming it and then he laid down rules for its daily care and preservation, and later he enriched it by stocking it with fresh game, until to-day, when Mrs. Vanderbilt is about to hand it over to the nation for a nominal sum per acre ($5), it possesses in an eminent degree those characteristics which every nature lover looks for in the ideal forest, stately trees, good trails, an abundance of game and perennial streams. Such is the noble heritage which this rich man elected to hand down to posterity.

Under the terms of the Weeks act, which permits the purchase of lands at the headwaters of navigable streams to conserve their water supply, the United States Forest Reservation Commission has approved the acquisition of Pisgah Forest at Mrs. Vanderbilt's figure. In accordance with her expressed wish the commission will retain the name of Pisgah Forest. The tract includes portions of Transylvania, Henderson, Buncombe and Hayward counties, North Carolina. It covers the entire eastern slope and considerable portions of the northern and western slopes of the Pisgah Range. It is traversed for the most part by tributaries of the French Broad River, which unites with the Holstein River at Knoxville, Tenn., to make the Tennessee River.

The nucleus of this property was a body of land belonging to the University of North Carolina which was bought by Mr. Vanderbilt twenty-four years ago. Additional purchases have rounded out the boundary and taken up interior holdings. Since acquiring the property Mr. Vanderbilt had spent large sums of money in its improvement. There are some seventy-five miles of graded roads, built at a cost of from $200 to $800 a mile. One road, seventeen miles long, graded by engineers, cost $3,000 a mile. In addition there are 165 miles of graded trails, constructed at a cost ranging from $30 to $80 a mile, making all portions of the tract readily accessible. These will be particularly valuable to the forest service in protection from fire.

Many of the lands which Mr. Vanderbilt acquired since the original purchase were mountain farms, portions of which were in cultivation. Most of these cultivated portions have naturally reverted to forests and now contain excellent stands of young timber. There are at least twenty-six houses in serviceable condition, some of them being cabins built after the patterns of those in the Black Forest in Germany.

The tract is now well stocked with deer, turkey and pheasant and the streams afford the best fishing in the Southern Appalachians, as they were systematically stocked from year to year with Eastern brook trout and rainbow trout from California. It is proposed to make it a game refuge for the preservation of the fauna of the Eastern mountains.

A scenic road nearly a mile in elevation overlooks the greater part of Pisgah Forest. Mr. Vanderbilt built it for the use of his automobiles and those of his friends in reaching his hunting ground lodge on the shoulder of Big Mount Pisgah, whose summit rises 5,757 feet above sea level. This road extends from the end of the macadam highway maintained by the county—a point twenty miles from Asheville—seven miles to the lodge, rising by a steady grade of from 3 to 7 per cent, and then continues ten miles along the ridge of Pisgah Range. One can picture the giant undulations of verdure which greet the eye of the traveller along this superb highway, stretching wave upon wave to the faint blue outline of the Great Smokies on the west and to the pinnacle of Mount Mitchell and the skyline of the Balsam Range on the north.

But enough of the scenic and sentimental side of this national purchase which the Forest Service Commission is seriously considering transforming into a national park and game preserve. It possesses as great, if not a greater, practical value as a protector of the headwaters of the French Broad River. A report to the Geological Survey describes the valley of the French Broad River as "one of the best agricultural valleys to be found in the East." But it goes on to say that one of the principal difficulties to be met with by farmers here is destructive floods in the bottom lands. It is the general testimony, it says, that these floods have increased as more and more land has been cleared on the hills.

Of course, in the present state of public knowledge concerning forestry and its problems, it needs little elucidation to establish cause and effect in this matter. Cut a forest down and its sponge dries up, its soil erodes and becomes fretted with gullies for the rapid shedding of water, and its streams become mere gutters for the elimination of the occasional rainfall. This is particularly true of land cleared for tobacco growing, which in this region has exhausted field after field of the lighter soils of the hills until finally the whole industry has been abandoned, leaving large areas of desolate red clay exposed to the cutting action of the torrent. It is doubly necessary, therefore, for the future prosperity of this whole promising valley that the forests which still clothe its sides be preserved, and particularly Pisgah Forest, whose sponge absorbs each rainfall and feeds gradually into its streams its surplus store, thus insuring a steady flow for the French Broad at its source. The government, in buying this great, beautiful treasure in trees, will therefore be attaining one of the main objects of the act providing for the Appalachian forest reserve, the regulation of interstate water flow.

TIMBER SUPPLY—OAK AND CHESTNUT PREDOMINATE.

Next in practical importance is the timber supply of this splendid tract. The ..ological survey has found that oaks and chestnuts predominate in the French Broad River Basin, forming together 65 per cent of the standing timber, the oaks 45 per cent and the chestnuts 20 per cent. Next come maple and hemlock and black gum, forming 4 per cent apiece; then birch and hickory, 3 per cent each; white pine and linn, each 2 per cent, and finally buckeye, beech, short leaf pine, ash, locust, cucumber and black pine, each 1 per cent. And struggling under the shade of these larger trees there abound promising young trees of poplar, walnut and cherry, which need only a judicious culling of their overpowering brethren and the consequent access of light to shoot up themselves to merchantable size.

In the twenty-five years that Mr. Vanderbilt watched over this forest no injudicious lumbering was permitted within its boundaries. The Forest Service will, of course, seek to prevent any in the future, to the end that the forest may be made to pay dividends yearly. It will probably, however, continue the contract, originally drawn to run twenty years, which Mr. Vanderbilt entered into with a lumber company for the cutting of timber in Pisgah Forest, one of the stipulations being that the company use approved forestry methods.

AREA OF THE NEW APPALACHIAN FOREST RESERVE.

With this purchase and with others approved at the same time the sum total of area of the new Appalachian forest reserve reaches approximately 1,077,000 acres. The purchase does not include Biltmore, the North Carolina home of Mrs. Vanderbilt and her daughter. With its 5,700 acres of beautiful forest and farm land, Biltmore occupies a position on the opposite bank of the French Broad River, whence a panoramic view of Pisgah Forest, with its wooded and rock-capped summits, may be obtained. The hunting lodge on the shoulder of Mount Pisgah, fifteen miles away in an airline, may be seen through glasses from Biltmore House. The distance by road, it may be added, is thirty miles—rather a long driveway for a private estate.

A year ago Mr. Vanderbilt sought to sell Pisgah Forest to the government, pricing 17,000 acres of virgin forest at $17 an acre and 69,000 acres at $5.75 an acre, the latter subject to the above mentioned timber contract, which he had entered into two years before. The members of the Forest Reservation Commission decided not to buy, however, for the reason, it is said, that they believed Mr. Vanderbilt would always maintain the property as a preserve and thus give to the government the advantages of stream supply conservation without cost. But Mr. Vanderbilt's death last March made the members of the commission realize the necessity of providing a more permanent landlord for this most valuable forest.

Mrs. Vanderbilt's offer made on May 1 means a saving of $200,000 to the government as compared with the price asked by her husband a year ago. The government, it is expected, will take title in si.. months.

JUNE 3, FIFTY YEARS AGO, GRANT MADE GREAT BLUNDER

THE bloodiest battle on the American Continent. The universal mutiny of the Army of the Potomac. The making of the greatest mistake in Grant's military career, and the consequent abandonment by him of the line on which only a few weeks before he had purposed to fight the war out if it took all summer. These are the memories which next Wednesday brings.

It was early in the last act of the drama. Grant, flushed with his Western triumphs from Donelson through Vicksburg to Lookout, had come East to win success where McClellan, Pope, Hooker and Burnside had failed, not realizing that now, for the first time since Shiloh, he was confronted by a first class commander with an efficient army. On May 2, 1864, he gave the order, "Forward to Richmond!" which three years before had led to so disastrous results; and on May 3 he crossed the Rapidan, the Rubicon of his campaign.

There he plunged into that "region of gloom and the shadow of death" which men appropriately named the Wilderness, hoping to get through it before he met the foe. The hope was vain. To the Southern soldiers every acre of that jungle was as familiar as the streets of their home towns. So within three days Lee struck fiercely, and each army lost in the first impact more than one-sixth of its entire force.

GRANT'S HISTORIC BOAST, "I PROPOSE," ETC.

That was the prelude. Grant instantly made not Richmond but Lee's army the prime object of his attack. That was his line, and "I propose," he said, "to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer." The very next day he fought Lee again at Spottsylvania, with appalling losses and little, if any, gain, though Barlow led his division of Hancock's corps almost to crowning victory in one of the most gallant exploits of the war. Still the order was: "Forward! Fight it out on this line!"

May 23 found the two armies fighting again, with the same results, at North Anna. And now Grant realized that he had in a measure been betrayed. Butler, at the south, had failed him, just as Grouchy failed Napoleon at Waterloo. Deprived of that aid, there seemed to be nothing to do but to push straight on, depending solely upon himself.

So June 1 found him within sight of Richmond, less than seven miles away. He was now on ground that was familiar to Meade and many others of the Army of the Potomac. They had been there two years before under McClellan. The battleground was then called Gaines's Mill, the scene of the second of the Seven Days' Battles, in which Fitz-John Porter did deeds of valor which would have ended the war then and there had not McClellan neutralized them with the biggest blunder of his whole campaign. But now the positions of the two armies were exactly reversed. Lee had McClellan's ground, and Grant had Lee's. The Federal army was on the very fields over which Stonewall Jackson and D. H. Hill had made their desperate but fruitless attack upon Porter; and now it was to make a still more desperate and fruitless assault upon the impregnable lines of Lee.

SHERIDAN CAPTURES OLD COLD HARBOR.

The operations began auspiciously. Sheridan, on June 1, captured the vantage point known as Old Cold Harbor—or Coal Harbor, as most then called it—and held it in spite of the furious attacks of Fitzhugh Lee. The next day he was relieved by Wright, with the 6th Corps, and Smith with the 18th, who that evening made a vigorous attack upon Lee's lines, and made substantial gains, though at heavy cost. Lee essayed a counter attack upon Warren's 5th Corps, with little effect.

It was a restless night. Repeated attacks were made by Lee, in the face of which the federal lines were rearranged. Grant held a council, of which the often repeated story is told that all his generals despondently advised that the army should fall back at daybreak from the position which it could not hope to hold; that Grant grimly overruled them, saying: "We will not wait till daybreak, but an hour before it move forward all along the line!" and that Lee, on hearing the onset next morning, exclaimed: "The Confederacy is lost, for the Yankees have got a man to lead them at last!" The story sounds well, but is scarcely susceptible of entire verification; though, indeed, that morning the advance was made all along the line.

MORNING OF JUNE 3—SIGNAL FOR THE CHARGE.

It was Friday morning, June 3. After the restless and busy night there was an hour of quiet at dawn. Then a single cannon shot at 4:30 o'clock—about sunrise—gave signal for the charge. The whole federal line rushed forward. Hancock was at the extreme left with the 2d Corps; next came Wright with the 6th, Smith with the 18th, Warren with the 5th and Burnside with the 9th. It was the first three that did the bulk of the fighting, and again, as at Spottsylvania, it was Barlow's division of Hancock's corps that won the chief honors of the day, with Gibbons's division sharing them, and with "Baldy" Smith a close second.

Never was there fiercer fighting, and never in our wars was there greater slaughter. The men seemed to have a premonition of what was before them, for thousands of them before the charge was made wrote their names and home addresses upon cards or scraps of paper and pinned them to the backs of their coats, in order that their dead bodies might be identified. No reconnoissance had been made at the front, and the advancing troops were everywhere met with a cross fire from Confederate entrenchments. Barlow and Gibbons, despite the butchery, broke through the first Confederate line and struck the second or main line. But they could not be supported, and were swept back by simply irresistible physical force. Within twenty minutes they had lost 3,000 men. The 6th Corps also struck clear in to the Confederate main line before it, too, was pushed back with more than 800 lost. "Baldy" Smith's 18th Corps had a particularly hard tussle, and emerged with 1,000 less than it had entered.

Repulsed, the army did not retreat, not even to its first position. At a distance of from twenty-five to fifty yards from the Confederate line the men halted, lay down, and with drinking cups, bayonets, knives, and even with their bare hands, dug trenches in which to shield themselves, and thus held some of the ground which had been so hardly won.

In less than half an hour the federal army had lost more than 7,000 in killed and wounded; a loss never equalled in any other battle in the war in the same space of time. More than half that loss was suffered within the first ten minutes after the signal gun.

Grant was remorseless. Another charge was promptly ordered. Meade transmitted the order to the corps commanders. Some of them ignored it. Some passed it on to their brigade and regimental officers. Some of these repeated it to the men. But not a man stirred. The order was repeated, with the same result. A third time Meade issued it, and a third time it was not obeyed, Smith openly refusing and the others making no effort to enforce it. The men lay in their shallow furrows, firing at every enemy that appeared, but not one would advance a step. They were ready for battle, but not for suicide.

THE EUPHEMISTIC NEWS REPORT OF WAR TIMES.

"Owing to the formidable character of the enemy's main works it was deemed impolitic to continue the assault." Thus ran the euphemistic news reports of the incident. The concrete, frigid fact was that the whole army spontaneously mutinied against the repetition of an undertaking that never should have been made at all. The corps commanders at last persuaded Grant of the futility of any further efforts of that kind, and he reluctantly acquiesced.

The crowning horror was the fact that for two or three days many of the dead and wounded lay uncared for upon the field, because Grant and Lee were unable to agree upon the terms of a brief armistice. When at last an agreement was reached the roll of the wounded had been greatly diminished and that of the dead correspondingly increased.

For nine days Grant stubbornly maintained his place. Then, on June 12, he retired from Cold Harbor, the poorer by 12,738 men than when he first reached the place. Since crossing the Rapidan he had lost 54,926 men in fighting an army of only 65,000. More than that, he abandoned his whole plan of campaign. On May 11 he had said: "I propose to fight it out on this line, if it takes all summer"; the line being to strike at Lee's army again and again until by sheer attrition, if in no other way, it was defeated and destroyed. On June 12, with the summer not yet really begun, he quit fighting on that line and removed his army to the south side of the James, making not Lee, but Richmond by way of Petersburg, his chief objective.

GRANT MAINTAINED HIS PLACE NINE DAYS.

Cold Harbor has been the subject of much controversy, sometimes acrimonious, which it would seem unprofitable to renew or to recall in detail. Final judgment has been passed upon it by the one man who was responsible for it. "Cold Harbor is, I think," said Grant, "the only battle I ever fought that I would not fight over again under the circumstances." And again, in his "Personal Memoirs": "I have always regretted that the last assault on Cold Harbor was ever made. No advantage whatever was gained to compensate for the heavy loss we sustained." From that verdict there can be no appeal, while the frank and voluntary rendering of it goes far toward atoning for the most costly and perhaps least excusable error in the great soldier's career.